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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIL #4421 2851349  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 121349Z OCT 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2473  
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1966  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 7627

UNCLAS ISLAMABAD 004421

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SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [EAID](#) [KSCA](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN SERIOUS ABOUT POLIO ERADICATION

REF: State 135139

¶1. (SBU) Economic Counselor and Economic Specialist met with Ministry of Health (MOH) Director General Lieutenant General (retired) Shahida Malik to deliver reftel demarche October 11. MOH Polio Country Coordinating officer Dr. Rehan Hafiz also attended the meeting. The Minister of Health is out of the country.

¶2. (SBU) Hafiz told Embassy officers that the GOP has documented 16 cases of polio this year, compared to 39 reported cases in 2006. He hopes that the total number of cases will not exceed 20 for 2007. The GOP is targeting 97% of an estimated 33 million children nationwide. Growing security concerns make reaching out to remote areas in the border areas challenging, but Malik commented that the GOP is determined to eradicate polio. Hafiz remarked that once they reach the children, the vaccine is not refused for religious reasons.

¶3. (SBU) All border crossings with Afghanistan now have capture points where children ages 5 or under are administered oral vaccines. Hafiz did not have any statistics on percentage of children vaccinated in the border areas. The GOP is working with its Afghan counterparts to conduct National Vaccination Programs on the same dates to ensure maximum coverage. Dr. Hafiz said that the GOP now has a vaccine that contains polio types 1,2,3 as well as isolated vaccines. In case of a positive identification, they go back and revaccinate with isolated vaccine, which is more effective.

¶4. (SBU) The GOP receives funding for polio eradication from the USAID, DFID, the Japanese Government, and the World Bank. He said that the GOP needs funding beyond Feb. 2008. Pakistan Development partners are meeting November 1 to discuss future funding.

¶5. (SBU) USAID Pakistan is beginning to implement a one-year \$475,000 program in the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to strengthen social mobilization for polio eradication and increase cross-border activities. One key component is increasing the number of cross border immunization posts and to ensure coordinated mobilization activities between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The socialization mobilization component could include Jirgas, capacity building for local journalists to cover health issues, and outreach activities targeting religious leaders and parents.

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